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## Red-faced over a few defects

Sometimes I feel really sorry for the people who live and work in Washington, D.C.

They seem to be far more sensitive and emotional than the rest of us out here. They're subject to extreme and sudden mood swings, from elation to deep depression.

I've learned this over the years by reading the various pundits who regularly tell us about "the mood of Washington."

There have been times when they've written that "the mood of Washington this week is one of deep melancholy."

This can be brought on by the arrest of a congressman for public indecency or a loss by the NFL's Redskins.

But only a few days later, you can read that "the mood of Washington this week is one of great elation."

That can be the result of the blooming of the cherry blossoms or the passage of a bipartisan bill to limit the imports of foreign canaries.

I've always felt grateful that those people in Washington keep these emotional swings to themselves. They don't expect the rest of us to join in or even understand the trauma that is brought on by the resignation of an undersecretary of interior.

But now that seems to be changing. We're expected to share in their emotional upheavals.

I discovered that yesterday morning, when I woke up feeling pretty good until I went through the papers and read the reports from Washington.

Most of the stories had similar phrases. "The United States has been embarrassed by . . ." "A high-level source said that this has caused great embarrassment to the United States . . ." "Several congressmen said that this is very embarrassing to . . ."

They were talking about Vitaly Yurchenko, the KGB spy who defected but then decided to go back to the Soviet Union, or Big Mamma Russia as it was called in old Russian novels.

It was only a few days ago that the mood of Washington was one of elation because he had come over to our side.

But now not only Washington, but the entire country, is embarrassed because he has pulled the old switcharoo, as they call it in the intelligence community.

Well, I'm as loyal a citizen as the next guy. So as I shaved, I could see my face getting redder and redder from embarrassment. I even found myself averting my gaze so as not to make eye contact in the mirror.

On the way to work, I stopped at the coffee shop for breakfast and I said to Yvonne, the counter girl, "I imagine you're feeling embarrassed this morning, huh?"

She tugged at her skirt and said, "Somethin' showing?"

"No. I mean this embarrassing business with Vitaly Yurchenko."

She gave me a suspicious look and said: "I never been out with any guy with that name. And I went straight home last night."

"I'm talking about the Russian spy who defected, then said he's going back. It has caused this country, and all of us in it, great embarrassment."

"Are you kiddin'?" Hey, I'm not embarrassed. I read about him, and he's the poor sucker who's embarrassed. I mean, he's really got a problem now."

"In what way?"

"It says in the stories that the real reason he defected was because when he was in this country before, he used to get it on with some married Russian woman who was here with her old man. And Vitaly wanted to get things going with her again."

"I read that."

"Yeah, but when he went to see her, she told him uh-uh, the party's over. She got kicks from swinging with a spy. But now that he defected, he's just another DP in a baggy suit."

"Ah, the pain of rejection."

"Sure. But you can't blame her. She don't want to boogie while CIA agents are peeking in the keyhole. So there's the poor stiff in a strange country with no girlfriend and a Russian accent. And he can't go nowhere without some CIA guys tagging along. With all that working against him, how's he ever gonna go into a singles bar and get lucky?"

"It would be unlikely."

"But that's not the worst of it. Now he's going home to his wife and kid. The poor guy is going to walk in and say, 'I'm home, Sasha.' She's gonna say, 'Where the hell you been, Vitaly?' He's gonna say: 'Oh, it was terrible. The Americans drug me, take me to States, try to make me tell secrets. Then I escape and come home to you as fast as I can. I don't even stop to have one with the guys.' Now, do you think any woman's gonna believe that?"

"It is a little far-fetched."

"Yeah. She's gonna say: 'Vitaly, I warned you about chasing skirts. I'm leavin' and taking little Boris and the color TV with me.'"

It's a story as old as man and woman.

"Right. But it just shows how dumb the Russians really are. He could have saved himself all that grief if he had done what any American man would have done before he defected."

"What's that?"

"He should have phoned his old girlfriend first. And if the old man answers, hang up."